



Micro Enterprise Resource Group
"THE VOICE OF MICRO ENTERPRISE IN CONNECTICUT"

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Testimony of

The Micro Enterprise Resource Group (MERG)

Monday, February 8, 2010

In Support of the Permanent commission on the Status of Women

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written support of PCSW on behalf of the Micro Enterprise Resource Group (MERG).

MERG's mission is to advocate for and promote the interests of micro enterprise in Connecticut. We represent approximately 320,000 Connecticut micro businesses, those employing fewer than ten people. There are 123,000 women-owned businesses in Connecticut, so MERG relies heavily on the hard work of the PCSW to accomplish our shared goals. PCSW is mandated to serve as a liaison between government and private interest groups, so their Women Owned Business Initiative includes collaboration with MERG. The bill-tracking they provide our members is crucial for us to fulfill our mission.

In addition to the support PCSW provides MERG, their Young Women's Leadership Program inspires and empowers young women aged 18-35 to emerge as leaders in business, government and the community. The Women in the Trades Network increases opportunities for women in the skilled trades and technical careers. Their Talent Bank contains the names and résumés of more than 450 highly qualified women for consideration for appointment to state boards and commissions. All of these programs work to further strengthen the economic independence of women in our state. Without them, women are less likely to be fully employed and have health insurance, so their health care bills go to the state. They are also far more likely to rely heavily on assistance and unemployment, which cost the state much more to sustain. The state has a genuine financial incentive to insure that PCSW be allowed to continue its mission.

We recognize a pressing need for the legislature to cut expenditures, but we strongly urge them to preserve the PCSW in its current capacity. We believe that it is precisely this poor economic climate that can be most devastating to women, and we fear backsliding on the gains of women business owners during these times. It is now, more than ever, that we need the PCSW to protect the rights and the health and safety of all Connecticut women.

Also, please consider the message you would send to more than half of Connecticut's population by curtailing the activities of this vital commission: women's rights are only possible

when we can afford them. Is this true? Are the rights and health and safety of women something we really want to toss on the scrap heap when times get tough? Is pay equity suddenly irrelevant because we have a deficit? We believe the issues of women's pay equity, sexual harassment, human trafficking, are much more than luxuries. We believe these are fundamental causes, vital to the human condition of more than 50 percent of our population. The work PCSW does is critical for the well being of more than half the state's citizens.

In the 35 years the PCSW has been active, they have brought about tremendous advances for women, but their work is far from done. We believe there is still a long way to go, and much of the violence and injustices against women will resurface in their absence. And it's not just deep-rooted, deliberate sexism that worries us. We are also concerned that future laws and policies could have an inadvertent negative impact on women and the businesses they own. PCSW is the only state institution that looks at proposed legislation to evaluate its potential impact on women and families, so their oversight is crucial.

Finally, we urge the legislature to remember why this commission is "permanent". Their work must always be allowed to continue without regard to unforeseeable conditions. The stakes are simply far too high.